Austin's Museums and Galleries in the Age of Black Lives Matter

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Contents

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Introduction

On May 25th, 2020, the United States witnessed the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers. His death served as a catalyst for protests condemning police brutality and triggered a rise in the profile of the Black Lives Matter movement. A call for racial justice can now be heard across all fifty states, as well as the demand for the dismantling of systemic racism that exists within American institutions. Included in these institutions is the art museum. Art museums are meant to be cultural institutions that educate visitors and inform them about art; unfortunately, however, they are not exempt from racist roots which have shaped art history as we know it today. As I pursue a career as an art historian, and plan to work in art museums, I feel it imperative to examine how these art museums and other cultural institutions are responding to the current events taking place concerning racial justice. Critical questions arise as cultural institutions make public statements of solidarity with the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities: Are these statements purely performative? Are they perhaps merely obligatory and perfunctory? Are these institutions actively working to dismantle their own manifestations of systemic racism? How are these institutions going to continue to use their platform to recognize and uplift BIPOC artists and make their institutions welcoming to broader constituencies? How can museums make themselves more relevant in the era of Black Lives Matter? To what extents is the dominant culture's racial injustice occurring within the art institution? Where were art museums' voices prior to the murder of George Floyd? This honors thesis will discuss the apparently systemic racism seen within the dominant museum sector over the last fifty years or so, to then examine the current responses of four Austin art institutions to the Black Lives Matter movement and the efforts of these institutions to enhance diversity and inclusivity concerning staff, exhibitions, artists, and audiences.

The first chapter of this paper examines how art historians have written about this topic. Some of these scholars were lone wolves in the field of art history, pointing out the systemic racism within art institutions. Scholars include Maurice Berger, Howardena Pindell, and Bridgett R. Cooks. It will also include the examination of Austin's Mexic-Arte's *Puente de Arte Panel Discussion: A Conversation on Racism within the Art Community*. The purpose of this chapter is to justify the examination of the exhibitions, artists, staff and public, examples in the second chapter. The inclusion of *Puente de Arte* is especially prominent as it features four women of color scholars who I may learn from as I am not a person of color. Listening to their points of view influence and guide the issues and questions with which I am engaging in this text.

The second chapter of this essay surveys the historical context of systemic racist roots planted in art museums through the last half a century or so. This assessment includes four main aspects of the art museum: exhibitions, artists, staff, and the public. Exhibitions such as *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America 1900-1968* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) will be examined. Arguably racially insensitive artworks such as *Open Casket* by Dana Schutz that was included in an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art will be looked at. Howardena Pindell and her longstanding work dedicated to racial censorship and racial inequality will be examined. The Mellon Foundation's 2015 and 2017 studies on diversity within museum staff will also be looked at. Finally, museums' relationships with the public will be examined through issues such as membership and admission fees as well as museums' responses to public unrest. This chapter will help contextualize current moments of protest, why the art community is demanding change, and why the museums and art galleries must evolve.

The third chapter includes the examination of four Austin institutions: The Contemporary Austin, the Blanton Museum of Art, Mexic-Arte Museum, and the George Washington Carver

Museum, Cultural and Genealogy Center. In this chapter, I attempt to examine the four institutions through their exhibitions, artists, staff, and interactions with the public as this is how the historical context is presented. My research of the museums includes interviews with staff members, social media data collection, and collected data relating to past exhibitions. The purpose of this chapter is to critically examine the diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion policies of these art institutions and how they might have changed after the murder of George Floyd. The intention of this is to see if long-lasting change in dismantling systemic racism is occurring in museums, or if their actions have been performative.

Chapter 1

Scholarly Views on Racism Within the Arts

The issue of racism within art museums is not new, but rather, increasing in public interest. An art museum is a space exhibiting works of art, ranging from paintings, drawings, sculptures, photographs, and more. The larger museum is often split into galleries featuring specific works of art or exhibitions.[1] Scholars throughout the discipline of art history have voiced concern and attempted to call out these institutions in their racist ways. These scholars provide guidance on how to critically examine museums and provide insightful questions to consider when looking at race within the art world. In this chapter, I will look at Bridget R. Cooks' *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum*, Maurice Berger's text "Are Art Museums Racist?", artist and anti-racist researcher Howardena Pindell, and the scholars involved in the virtual panel *Puente de Arte Panel Discussion: A Conversation on Racism within the Art Community*.

To begin, I will look at Bridget R. Cooks, who is perhaps the most prominent scholar to look at in my research as she also surveyed exhibitions throughout time and space in America, in her book *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum*. Cooks' goal was to "explore the assertions made in the unequal and often contested relationship between African American artists, curators, visitors, and critics in the mainstream art world."[2] Cook analyzed major exhibitions representing African American art and culture beginning in the 1930s through 2002. I am going to briefly outline important points brought up by Cooks before moving to individual chapters as they unfold chronologically. An idea introduced by Cooks is the role of

[1] "Art Museum," New World Encyclopedia, accessed April 11, 2021, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Art_museum

[2] Bridget R.Cooks, *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 1

the art museum as an instructive institution, not just a place to display objects.[3] With the exclusion of African American artwork and consequently, incomplete narratives, the museum forgoes this educational position. Another point by Cooks discusses how Black artists were frequently not considered by art critics, and therefore failed by the mainstream media and art press. She then iterates the existence of a hierarchy of humanity in mainstream museums. This hierarchy was established in art history by Johann Wicklelmann and his belief that the ancient Greek's physical beauty allowed them to produce excellent artwork.[4] The hierarchy places African Americans towards the bottom and considers their work to be primitive and not of the same status or value as White artists or European artwork.

Progressing on to the individual chapters, Cooks begins her analysis with *Negro Art in The Modern Art Museum*. The context of this chapter lies in the 1930s, when people of color were considered "perpetual outsiders," primitive artists, or "as contemporary artists whose work was exhibited to prove the true democracy of America that only existed as an idealized goal."[5] Cooks proceeds to look at exhibitions from that decade such as *Exhibition of Sculpture by William Edmondson* and *Contemporary Negro Art*. She then goes on to discuss African American artists like William Edmondson and Jacob Lawrence, as well as the impact of the media on the public's perception of the artist.[6] Cooks then highlights the realization of museums, in the late 1930s, such as the Baltimore Museum of Art, and their need for better public outreach and public relations.[7] The following chapters of the book question and observe the same topics but regarding different exhibitions. Chapter two, *Black Artists and Activism: Harlem on My*

[3] *Ibid*, 3
[4] *Ibid*, 8
[5] *Ibid*, 18
[6] *Ibid*, 25-30, 44
[7] *Ibid*, 35

Mind, 1969, is a case study on the exhibition mentioned in the title, *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900- 1968*. Cooks explores the reaction of the public to the exhibition and activism surrounding it. She also examines the Metropolitan Museum of Art's need to be "socially relevant," the reasons for the exhibition, and the organization and execution of the show.[8] Other points on *Harlem on My Mind* made by Cooks, in addition to Aruna D'Souza, are observed in the second chapter of this thesis. In Cooks' third chapter, *Filling the Void: Two Centuries of Black American Art*, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's exhibition *Two Centuries of Black America* is examined. At the time of creation, 1976, this show was "the only historically comprehensive exhibition of art by Black Americans ever to be presented by a major American art museum."[9] Cooks evaluates the curatorial objectives, public reception, and the impact and challenges of the exhibition placed on other American museums.[10] She then moves on to the time period of 1994-95 and the exhibition *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art* shown at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1994. Cooks looks at the ambiguity of the controversial exhibition and how the intended interpretation of racism and sexism by the Whitney might be missed.[11] Cooks ends her survey of exhibitions with the 2002 exhibition *The Quilts of Gee's Bend* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. She examines "the persistence of limited critical frameworks for exhibiting and interpreting Black creativity in the American art museum."[12] Throughout the book, Cooks analyzed two methodologies of exhibiting African Americans in art museums. The first concerns an "anthropological paradigm of Black racial difference and White normalcy."[13] The second

[8] *Ibid*, 54-65
[9] *Ibid*, 87
[10] *Ibid*, 87
[11] *Ibid*, 112
[12] *Ibid*, 137
[13] *Ibid*, 155

involves the "corrective approach to redefining and expanding American art."[14] Cooks also moves through time and across space, in American art museums, to survey and look critically at how African Americans have been represented within these institutions. She concludes with hopeful sentiments that mainstream museums begin to show more exhibitions of art by Black artists, so single exhibitions do not carry the weight for all Black artists' representation.[15] I use Cooks' methodologies to examine the historical context of race issues within art museums in chapter 2 of this thesis. Cooks begins her survey at an earlier time, while I extend mine past her cutoff of 2002. The main driving factors I pulled from her case studies are exhibitions, artists, staff, and interactions with the public, which outline the structure of the following chapter and areas I look at concerning current Austin art institutions.

Moving forward, Maurice Berger held museums accountable for their racial injustice throughout the late twentieth century and until his untimely passing in 2020.[16] In Berger's text, "Are Art Museums Racist?" he questions the systemic racism within art institutions and the resistance of White people to give artists of color a place within museums. In "Are Art Museums Racist?", Berger aimed to "examine the complex institutional conditions that result in the exclusion and misrepresentation of major cultural voices in the United States."[17] An inspiring question Berger brought up during his examination is if museums are "mirroring" social change, or can the museum play an active role in changing institutional racism?[18] Cooks brings this same idea up in her analysis of *Harlem on My Mind*. *Harlem on My Mind* is a prime example of a museum deflecting demands for social change, rather than trying to make a difference for people

[14] *Ibid*, 155
[15] *Ibid*, 160
[16] Neil Genzlinger, "Maurice Berger, Curator Outspoken About Race, Is Dead at 63," *New York Times*, March 26, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/26/arts/maurice-berger-dead.html
[17] Maurice Berger, "Are Art Museums Racist?" *How art becomes history: Essays on art, society, and culture in post-New Deal America* (1992): 145-146
[18] *Ibid*, 146

of color within museums. This exhibition took place in the 1960s, Berger produced his article in the 1990s. The art museum made no quantum development during this time, or the question "Are Art Museums Racist?" need not be asked. If we look to the present in 2020, museums are making statements of solidarity in response to the murder of George Floyd; is this any different than the fifty-five years prior in terms of museums taking performative action because of social pressure? Next, Berger brings up the exclusion of artists of color from exhibitions and references statistics collected by Howardena Pindell to prove the lack of representation within museums. An additional factor brought up by Berger is the African American museum and its conflicted role either in helping or, arguably, hindering artists of color.[19]

In my examination of past and present museums, I am looking in particular at the diversification of museum staff. Berger speaks to this issue in the art world as there is a scarcity of people of color in policy-making positions.[20] Berger quotes Lowery Sims, associate curator of 20th-century art at the Met who stated, "Art history was not a career that Black middle-class children were taught to aspire," and that "Black art historians are an even rarer breed."[21] We must take this one step further and ask why are there no people of color in these positions? Sims answers this by stating that the reason for this lack of African Americans in the art history field is due to the lack of African American culture within art history courses in universities and lack of access to museums for people of color.[22] The effect of lack of diversification in staff leads to an absence of diversification in exhibitions and artists.

Towards the end of Berger's article, he chooses to look at improvements for African Americans within the museum. This is important because, while we must examine the past and

[19] *Ibid*, 147
[20] *Ibid*, 150
[21] *Ibid*, 150
[22] *Ibid*

its failures, we must look to the future and see where progress is being made so dismantlement of systemic racism can become a reality. Some aspects that made exhibitions successful were correct representations of Black history through educational tools, producing spaces that place art in a "broader social, economic and cultural context of the society that produces it."[23] Together, these characteristics create an environment which invites Black communities to interact with art while feeling welcome in a museum environment. Despite improvements, Berger does not let his readership forget the tokenism of certain exhibitions. There is much more needed work to be done before lasting change can occur. Berger suggests steps museums may take, for example, creating exhibitions that make white visitors question their own racist tendencies; educational and internship programs for students of color; commitment to exhibiting artists of color; introducing educational programs; and the introduction of satellite museums in diverse communities.[24] But what remains most important, according to Berger, is a museum's ability to examine and educate itself in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion.[25] Berger's focus ends on the staff and interaction with the public of a museum. From the board of directors to the audience of the museum, both groups must unlearn racist tendencies to allow people of color into the art world.

Another key activist, in museum equity is the artist and anti-racist researcher Howardena Pindell. Pindell takes a quantitative and qualitative approach to her research and artwork. She often uses her own experiences as inspiration for her art and writing. In Pindell's text *On Making A Video: Free, White and 21*, the experience of the Black female artist is revealed. She uses her work to comment on her role as a token Black artist, while also focusing on the censorship of

[23] *Ibid*, 157, 160
[24] *Ibid*, 162
[25] *Ibid*, 162

Black artists from exhibitions and galleries within New York. While reflecting on her own encounters, Pindell collected statistics concerning artist representation within New York museums. This data was collected over a thirty-year period and revealed the overwhelming lack of representation of artists of color within exhibitions. Both topics of censorship and statistics are discussed in more detail in the following chapter of this thesis. Pindell was a prolific writer, confronting topics of racism in art that often made those in the community around her uncomfortable. After being in a car accident in the late 1970's, Pindell suffered from temporary long and short-term amnesia. She realized many were pleased by her loss of memory. There was, apparently, hope her injuries would temporarily silence her voice and calls for justice in the art community. She believed this wish for her silence and prolonged injury to be an extension of slavery and racism.[26]

Transitioning to other conversations on racial injustice in the arts, *Puente de Arte Panel Discussion: A Conversation on Racism within the Art Community* was a virtual seminar hosted by Mexic-Arte Museum in August of 2020.[27] The museum included the following statement on the virtual panel:

> In response to the Black Lives Matter protests, and social injustices happening across the country, Mexic-Arte Museum staff felt the need and responsibility as a cultural institution, to use the museum's influence within the community to aid in the amplification of the voices of the historically unheard and uplift a message of solidarity. Puente de Arte (Art Bridge) Panel Discussion highlights BIPOC artists and scholars, sharing their experiences within the art community in Texas and beyond. The museum's ultimate goal is to ensure a positive impact on

[26] Howardena Pindell, "On Making a Video: Free, White and 21, accessed September 27, 2020, https://pindell.mcachicago.org/the-howardena-pindell-papers/on-making-a-video-free-white-and-21-1992/
[27] "Puente de Arte Panel Discussion: A Conversation on Racism within the Art Community," Mexic-Arte Museum, YouTube, August 28, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PH-m6SVnang

> the community, and to keep the momentum going to work towards healthy, and equitable changes.[28]

Panelists included Dr. Cherise Smith, Chair of African and African Diaspora Studies Department and Professor of African and African Diaspora Studies and Art History at The University of Texas at Austin, Tammie Rubin, founder of Black Mountain Project and Associate Professor of Ceramics and Sculpture at St. Edward's University, Elaina Brown-Spence, Printmaker and Illustrator, Dr. Cary Cordova, Associate Professor in American Studies at The University of Texas at Austin, specializing in Latino/Latina/Latinx cultural production, and Mexic-Arte Museum Development Coordinator, Danielle Houtkooper as moderator.[29] This panel is important to include as it involved scholars discussing contemporary times as a direct result of the Black Lives Matter Protests. It also features women of color prominent in the Austin art community. The panel was a great example of representation by an art museum and gives insight to the current issue of systemic racism within museums as well as personal experiences of the scholars. Certain sentiments stuck out to me while observing the panel. Dr. Smith spoke about her 30 years in the art field. She believed in the 1990s that the integration of the mainstream museum was taking place, yet she still witnesses calls for full integration today. Therefore, the problem is the "changing same" and little has improved within the last 30 years.[30] Mainstream museums are not opening their doors to intellectual workers who are people of color. Brown-Spence spoke about her experience with being perceived as a token student at Texas Christian University, and the feeling of universities choosing one Black student to represent the entire school and the idea of the model minority. Tammie Rubin then reflected on her experience as a Chicago-youth going

[28] *Ibid*
[29] *Ibid*
[30] *Ibid*

to the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. In a city where the population during the 1980's was almost 50% Black, Rubin notes that there was no staff representation at MCA beyond the Black security guards.[31] If people of color do not feel welcomed and invited into the museum, they will not feel comfortable making use of the gallery space. When going back to the same institution years later, Rubin observed some change in events, visitor, and staff demographics, but states this is still not enough. Barriers are still in place preventing inclusion of people of color within art museums. Economic factors, such as unpaid internships and the cost of graduate school, prevent certain demographics from accessing opportunities that allow for careers and education in the arts. Rubin stresses the importance of education, building from the bottom up, rather than change happening from the top down with museum boards and donors. There needs to be equity on all levels.

The panel was also open to questions from the audience. One audience member questioned if culture-specific museums benefit or hurt communities of color. The immediate answer from all scholars was that they never hurt the communities they serve. Dr. Smith could speak specifically to this as she established the ethnically specific Christian-Green Gallery and Idea Lab as part of the Art Galleries at Black Studies, University of Texas at Austin.[32] The galleries are interested in promoting art that deals with the narratives of people of African descent, but this is not the only framework of the galleries. They are interested in showing work by other backgrounds as well. Mainstream museums that are supposedly encyclopedic are also intended to be universal, but often only represent White and Western culture. It is important to look at these museums and analyze their framework to see how they are moving forward in terms

[31] Patrick Reardon, "City About Equal in Terms of Race," *Chicago Tribune*, September 23, 1986, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1986-09-23-8603110287-story.html
[32] Art Galleries at Black Studies, The University of Texas at Austin, accessed April 11, 2021, https://www.galleriesatut.org/

of Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI) and find out what is hindering larger institutions from doing so. Brown-Spence went on to say that the change needs to be concrete and not surface level. For example, universities that re-catalogue their courses to look diverse without making a real effort of institutional change. Rubin believes there needs to be proof of change for those that have been hurt. The damage done cannot be repaired through newly established policies, but by outreach. Cordova agreed that there is an issue of trust between art institutions and communities of color. To obtain this trust, there must be an established relationship and investigation of the past. Cordova wraps up the question by stating that the history of galleries of color is not long, but very important. She states that these galleries evolved out of the need of an important role to fulfil objectives that mainstream museums were not.[33]

Other points of the panel discussion revolved around representation and the use of the words 'ethnically specific.' What is the correct percentage of exhibited artists of color? Should a museum's collection reflect the population of the country in terms of race? The panel itself was created because of the attention surrounding the Black Lives Matter protests and call for equality in museums. Once this buzz dies down, how do we keep the momentum going? I found the honesty of Dr. Smith admirable when she admitted she does not know how to dismantle the racism and colonialism that brought supposedly encyclopedic museums into being. Rubin believes mainstream museums need to acknowledge what has happened in their foundation. She suggests these institutions begin with things that do not take committees and are essentially 'common sense': funding, representation, narratives, public statements, staff. There needs to be consistency as well; people of color should not be at the mercy of whatever higher institutions believe is on trend at the moment. A concluding sentiment from the panelists was that museums

[33] "Puente de Arte Panel Discussion: A Conversation on Racism within the Art Community," Mexic-Arte Museum, YouTube, August 28, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PH-m6SVnang

should analyze their demographics and look at how they treat people within their gallery space.[34] Mexic-Arte's panel was informative and beneficial for the Austin community. The museum found a way of making the panel work through zoom, which also allows them to reach more audiences. Unfortunately, the video has less than 200 views and I believe it would be valuable if a larger audience were to view the panel.

[34] *Ibid*

Chapter 2

Survey of Museum Attitudes Concerning Race: 1965- 2019

To understand what is happening in the art museum today, it is imperative to understand what the term systemic racism means, as well as where it plays a role throughout the history of the art museum. An art museum is a space exhibiting works of art, ranging from paintings, drawings, sculptures, photographs, and more. The larger museum is often split into galleries featuring specific works of art or exhibitions.[35] For the purpose of this paper, only the last fifty-five years will be examined, beginning in the year 1965 onward. This period was chosen because of the large scope of the topic, and the parallels found between the events leading to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Black Lives Matter protests and movement that gained particular momentum in May of 2020. Black Lives Matter was established in 2013 as a response to the acquittal of the murderer of Trayvon Martin. Their mission is "to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes."[36] Protests erupted in May of 2020 as a response to the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, captured and recorded on camera.[37]

In the years leading to 1964 and 1965, America saw extreme racial polarization alongside the uprising of protests and the Civil Rights Movement. The years from 1945- 1963 are known as the early Civil Rights Movement. During this time, the country saw Brown v. Board of Education, freedom rides, the Montgomery bus boycott, and more. The pressure from this movement led to President Lyndon B. Johnson signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the

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[35] "Art Museum," New World Encyclopedia, accessed April 11, 2021, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Art_museum

[36] Black Lives Matter, accessed April 12, 2021, https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/

[37] Evan Hill, Ainara Tiefenthäler, Christiaan Triebert, Drew Jordan, Haley Willis and Robin Stein, "How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody," *New York Times*, Updated April 6, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html

Voting Rights Act of 1965.[38] African Americans during this time were reacting to the continuing outrages of lynching and other racial violence including the murder of Emmett Till, in 1955, segregation, and overall, the injustice placed upon the African American community, and other communities of color, within the United States. Similarly, in 2020, we witnessed persistent evidence of the same sorts of outrages. America has witnessed the egregious and shocking deaths of men and women of color at the hands of fellow Americans and those that are supposed to protect us, the police. The murder of George Floyd, along with countless others such as Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, served as catalysts for the Black Lives Matter movement and protests that erupted in May of 2020.[39] As seen fifty-five years ago, there are still groups of people fighting against these movements. In the 1960's, they were members of the Ku Klux Klan and their sympathizers, in 2020 we see white supremacist groups along with those who support the now former President, Donald Trump.[40] In both instances, people are marching and protesting for the lives of people of color, while opposing forces attempt to oppress and maintain systemic racism within the United States. Pronounced social change, along with government legislation, must occur for a transformation of racial equality to take place. This is where the art museum comes in to play as a platform where social change and activism could take place, rather than reinforce systemic racism as a societal norm.

Systemic racism is racism that is normalized and rooted within all aspects of society. It plays a role in the wealth gap, employment, housing discrimination, government surveillance,

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[38] Jamie Wilson, "50 Events That Shaped African American History: An Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic. 50 events That shaped African American history: An encyclopedia of the American mosaic," (Greenwood Press, 2019)
[39] Richard Fausset, "What We Know About the Shooting Death of Ahmaud Arbery," New York Times. November 13, 2020 https://www.nytimes.com/article/ahmaud-arbery-shooting-georgia.html
"Breonna Taylor: What happened on the night of her death?" BBC News, US & Canada. October 8, 2020 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-54210448
[40] Peter Jamison, "In Gettysburg, Trump supporters clash with Black Lives Matter protesters as election nears" The Washington Post. October 30, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2020/10/26/gettysburg-trump-black-lives-matter-clashes/

incarceration, drug arrests, immigration arrests, infant mortality and more.[41] Institutional racism is found within the art museum; it can be seen through the choice of exhibitions, staff hiring practices, which artists are selected, and what form public outreach takes. These four interconnected core structures of the museum inform the public what institutions value and what type of mission they carry. A staff that is not diverse will influence the choice of exhibitions and artists. Personal biases of a non-diverse museum staff might on occasion lead to insensitive artwork being displayed, and more generally, a lack of representation among artists. Museums that only exhibit white artists are sending messages to people of color that the museum is not a place for them; as they, their stories, their histories, are not reflected in the art. The following sections will address these different aspects of the art museum as entry points where systemic racism plays an active role. They will also show how, rather than being a place for activism and catalyst for social revolution, art museums have been parroting social change while reinforcing systemic racism.

EXHIBITIONS

In the following section, I discuss examples of when, where and how museums have arguably got things wrong, and demonstrated racial insensitivity, while claiming to be undertaking gestures of inclusion. *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America 1900-1968* was an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) in 1969. What was meant to be an impactful exhibition to open the museum to the Black community of not just Harlem, but New York as a whole, became an act of performativity and one of the most controversial exhibitions in American history.[42] During the 1960s, the Met had a history of excluding

[41] "WHAT IS SYSTEMIC RACISM? [VIDEOS]" race forward. https://www.raceforward.org/videos/systemic-racism

[42] Aruna D'Souza, Parker Bright & Pastiche Lumumba, "Act 3 Harlem on My Mind Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1969. In Whitewalling: Art, race & protest in 3 acts (pp. 105-146)," (New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2018)

communities of color from taking part in museum activities. The museum guards during this time often would turn away members of the Black and Latinx communities by saying that the museum was a private club.[43] To right these wrongs, the museum decided to produce a radical exhibition specifically for the Black population of New York. The museum appeared to be taking the appropriate steps to support those that were previously excluded. They had Black collaborators within the curatorial staff, as well as three advisory committees of Black cultural leaders, all working with the curator. But this was, or appeared to be, little more than an effort of performative activism.[44] The curator of the exhibition was a White Jewish man named Allon Schoener. He brought on three Black advisors to assist in the curation, yet only one was from Harlem. Thus, the insight into the neighborhood in question was lacking. The advisory committees that were brought on complained that Schoener, as well as the director of the Met, Thomas Hoving, were not acting on any of their suggestions; they were just there to make Schoener seem legitimate. Schoener himself later admitted this.[45] The Met did not actively try to take in suggestions and critique from the community they were supposedly trying to include. They were only interested in creating a veneer of the museum's integrity by adhering to the social pressures of the time calling for an increase in diversity and inclusion.

Moving on to the exhibited artwork, Schoener made the decision to utilize Black and white photography as the primary focus of the gallery space (See Figure 1). At the time, photography was not considered as legitimate as painting and sculpture.[46] This means the exhibition used an illegitimate mode of representation, in the art community's eyes, to represent an already discriminated against community of color. Perhaps the biggest mistake of all– no art

[43] *Ibid*
[44] *Ibid*
[45] *Ibid*
[46] *Ibid*

was included by Black artists in what was the first Met exhibition to supposedly acknowledge African American culture.[47] The exhibition was ultimately a way for the Met to cater to the elitists who, at the time, found it "radically chic," according to Aruna D'Souza, to be a part of the Civil Rights Movement without sacrificing their own life of luxury and power. The exhibition was an opportunity to represent a marginalized community; but there was no real intent of reformation or inclusion. Rather, the museum followed a social trend to better their public appearance. The museum lacked diversity in the staff, had no relationship with the Black community of Harlem to which they were trying to appeal, and included no Black artists within an exhibition about a Black community.

Harlem on My Mind was met with a variety of responses from the public. A section of the public was angered by the museum's exhibition which led to public protests. Two "well-established" Black artists, Romare Bearden and Norman Lewis, met with Schoener in 1968 to express their disdain with the exhibition. They were specifically unhappy with the decision to use only photographs as a means of representation.[48] Bearden and Lewis argued that "if the Met wanted to open its doors to Harlem, Black artists should be included."[49] In November of 1968, Bearden, Jean Hutson, and Harlem-based artist Benny Andrews organized a protest against the exhibition. Schoener completely ignored the demonstration and continued with his work. Andrews also formed the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC) in January of 1969, for the purpose of protesting *Harlem on My Mind*.[50] Signs at the demonstration had questions that read "Harlem on whose mind?" and "Whose image of whom?"[51] BECC was seeking answers

[47] *Ibid*
[48] Bridget R.Cooks, *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 72
[49] *Ibid*, 72
[50] *Ibid*, 72
[51] *Ibid*, 73

from Schoener, as well as the Met, to their questions. They wanted to "articulate the difference between the museum's representations of Harlem and their own rejected efforts to include their perspectives through self-representation."[52] BECC felt the museum's treatment towards them was the "continuation of a racist patriarchal hegemonic system of White control."[53] Demands from the coalition included structural change within the museum. This included appointing Black people as curators and other policy-making positions, as well as demanding the museum create a relationship with the "Total Black community."[54] The BECC called for a boycott of the exhibition and invited anyone to join them in protest. To put a stop to the demonstrations, Schoener announced that there would be an exhibition of contemporary Black art in February of 1969. This exhibition never took place which created a further sense of distrust from Black communities.

Moving on several decades and in to the 21st century, I would like to reference another art museum episode that again spoke of racial insensitivity. Dana Schutz's painting *Open Casket* (2016) caused an uproar after its display in the 2017 Whitney Biennial (see Figure 2). The subject matter of the painting is based on a photograph of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old boy lynched in Mississippi in 1955 for being accused of whistling at a white woman.[55] Emmett Till's mother held an open casket funeral with the intent of showing the brutality her son faced and the horror she had to encounter. She also insisted that the photograph of Emmett in the casket be circulated, so the world could see what she saw.[56] This image of Emmett Till became a catalyst

[52] *Ibid*, 73
[53] *Ibid*, 73
[54] *Ibid*, 74
[55] Aruna D'Souza, Parker Bright & Pastiche Lumumba, "Act 1 Open Casket Whitney Biennial, 2017. In Whitewalling: Art, race & protest in 3 acts (pp. 15-63)," (New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2018)
[56] *Ibid*

for the Civil Rights movement in the 1950's, as well as associated with "the lived reality of Blackness."[57]

The decision of Dana Schutz, a White female artist, to paint this subject matter raises many questions. The artist's intent may have been of goodwill, as Schutz stated she could relate to the artwork because she too is a mother, but ultimately shows a lack of sensitivity and awareness of cultural appropriation and white privilege.[58] Schutz opened herself up to accusations of furthering her career and making profit as an artist by making a spectacle out of the death of a Black boy.[59] This is not an act of allyship by Dana Schutz or the Whitney. The Whitney cannot be excluded from this conversation, as they made the decision to exhibit the painting in the 2017 Biennial. The museum has an extensive history of racial exclusion, earning it the nickname "the Whitey."[60] As recent as the 2014 Biennial, the Whitney included only nine Black artists out of a total of 118.[61] Included in this exhibition was the alter ego of white male artist Joe Scanlan. His alter ego was a Black woman artist by the name of "Donelle Woolfred." Scanlan's work essentially was blackface, yet the curators of the exhibition still made the ill choice to include it. Considering the reaction to the 2014 exhibition, it is surprising that the curators of the 2017 Whitney Biennial, who incidentally were both of people of color, would make the decision to include *Open Casket* in the 2017 Biennial. The Whitney often attempts to create controversy and conversation through their exhibitions, but it should not be through accusations of racism, racial insensitivity and appropriation of the Black community. Protests occurred, letters were written, and performance art which blocked the painting from view all

[57] *Ibid*
[58] *Ibid*
[59] *Ibid*
[60] *Ibid*
[61] *Ibid*

took place following the exhibition. The Whitney's response to the controversy was arguably muted and it fell to the curators to make a statement defending the exhibition and painting. A decision was eventually made to hold a conversation at the museum regarding the controversy. This action served the interest of the museum, not the community that was affected by the painting. The protestors' demands were explicit in wanting the removal of the painting, but the museum had no intent to do this, and an exhibition that featured a number of artists of color became focused on a white woman artist.[62] Claudia Rankine, a poet invited by the museum to host a conversation on "Perspectives on Race and Representation" with her group Racial Imaginary Institute, made a statement that the museum was taking "a first step" in this issue.[63] The reality is that the Whitney has been made aware of their antiblackness tendencies since the 1960s. As artist Lyle Ashton Harris stated at the conversation at the Whitney, "if the Whitney hadn't figured it out yet, it wasn't because they didn't have the information, but because they were actively ignoring the issue to disastrous effect."[64] Aruna D'Souza's chapter *ACT 1: Open Casket, Whitney Biennial, 2017,* in her book *Whitewalling* is the most authoritative text on the *Open Casket* controversy.

The reaction by sections of the public to the Whitney when they exhibited *Open Casket* in 2017 was that of outrage. Artist Parker Bright staged a public performance in which he walked into the museum, blocked the painting from view, and wore a shirt with the words "Black Death spectacle" upon them (See Figure 5). Onlookers assisted him by videotaping and taking his place in front of the piece when he was not there. Hannah Black, along with numerous other Black artists wrote a letter to the Whitney, made public on Facebook, but eventually removed, calling

[62] *Ibid*
[63] *Ibid*
[64] *Ibid*

for the immediate removal and destruction of the painting.[65] The Whitney had two options: to listen or to ignore. They decided to ignore the request of the public and instead hold a conversation that served no purpose as the public called for change, but the museum was not willing. This interaction affected the relationship between the public and the Whitney. The Whitney's decision only suppressed the voices of those they continuously oppress with the goal to create controversy. So long as these relationships are damaged between museums and communities of color, systemic racism will remain prevalent within art institutions.

ARTISTS

When discussing artists in terms of systemic racism in the art museum, the voice of the Black artist must be emphasized. Artist Howardena Pindell has devoted her life and work to the issue of race within the world as well as in the art community (See Figure 3). Pindell wrote a series of papers concerning art world racism in which she discusses the position of the Black artist and censorship in museums and galleries. In 1989, the Metropolitan Life Gallery and Studio Museum in Harlem were meant to exhibit *Art as a Verb*, an exhibition containing thirteen artists of color who produced political and emotional work.[66] Both exhibition spaces did not want to exhibit some of the artworks, including that of Pindell's, because the subject matter was found to be inappropriate. Eventually, the Studio Museum chose to exhibit the artwork that was found to be too controversial that it supposedly needed censorship. Pindell found issue with the "corporate fathers" from Metropolitan Life who decided the artwork must be censored, but also emphasized the silence of the rest of the art world on the matter. She claims, "the art world was

[65] Aruna D'Souza, Parker Bright & Pastiche Lumumba, "Act 1 Open Casket Whitney Biennial, 2017. In Whitewalling: Art, race & protest in 3 acts (pp. 15-63)," (New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2018)
[66] Howardena Pindell, "Breaking the silence: The second in a two-part series on art world racism," Retrieved September 27, 2020, https://pindell.mcachicago.org/the-howardena-pindell-papers/breaking-the-silence/

silent, hearing nothing, saying nothing, doing nothing!"[67] In her own experience as an artist, Pindell has witnessed the controversy and exclusion of artists of color from prominent institutions. This exclusion comes from a wish of neutrality, or the avoidance of 'controversy' rather than a stance of activism. Pindell brings up numerous examples of artist censorship in her writing to show the long history of bias and discrimination of artists of color. Some examples brought forth by Pindell concerned Adrian Piper's Adrian Piper's *Open Letter from Adrian Piper*, Diego Rivera's *Man at the Crossroads,* and the 1989 Pathfinder mural. *Open Letter from Adrian Piper* dropped from Donald Kuspit's exhibition *Art of Con-science: The Last Decade*. Piper's work was dropped because her words, concerning her desire to politicize the art world by bringing attention to the fact that she was the only "Third World artist" included in the exhibition, were seen as a threat.[68] Diego Rivera painted a mural titled *Man at the Crossroads* at Rockefeller Center in New York City in 1932. The mural demonstrated tensions between art and politics in a way that some viewed as promoting communism, after a newspaper article with the headline "Rivera Paints Scenes of Communist Activity and John D. Jr. Foots the Bill," was released in 1933.[69] After the publication of the headline, Rivera received a multitude of letters asking him to change the subject matter, and eventually he was fired. After he left New York, the mural was chiseled off the wall.[70] In 1989, the Pathfinder mural project in New York was defaced by white paint that covered prominent historical Black figures, among others.[71] The mural was a multi-ethnic venture, created in collaboration of 80 artists from 20 different countries.[72] The subject matter of the mural was "a celebration of the revolutionary struggles in

[67] *Ibid*
[68] *Ibid*
[69] Allison Keyes, "Destroyed By Rockefellers, Mural Trespassed On Political Vision," NPR, March 9, 2014, https://www.npr.org/2014/03/09/287745199/destroyed-by-rockefellers-mural-trespassed-on-political-vision
[70] *Ibid*
[71] *Ibid*
[72] Antislavery Usable Past, University of Nottingham, http://antislavery.ac.uk/items/show/309

Cuba, Grenada, Nicaragua and South Africa, as well as in America."[73] The vandalism was instigated by inflammatory newspaper articles calling for the mural's removal.[74] Pindell found the censorship and silence of the art community as acts of violence towards its members who are artists of color. She continues on to note the performative sense of care and promotion of the Black community from White critics and writers who are only ultimately concerned with maintaining their own power.

From 1986-1996, Howardena Pindell collected statistics concerning artist representation within New York art institutions. Using printed announcements, posters, and press releases, Pindell gathered statistics for the percent of White artists found in given exhibitions within both the private and public sector of New York. Eight out of nineteen of the exhibitions were composed of 100% exclusively white artists. Ten of the nineteen were between 90-99% white, and the one remaining exhibition was found at 88% white.[75] Pindell describes the artworld as a "nepotistic interlocking network," that prevents artists of color from being able to exhibit and sell their work.[76] Museums, at the time, often allowed galleries to distinguish between valued and not valued artists. Therefore, if artists of color are "locked out" on the gallery level, they are "locked out" of all higher institutions, i.e., the museum, because the galleries feed into the museums.[77] When artists of color were exhibited, the exhibiting galleries were often not reviewed in art publications which meant little exposure for the artists. If mainstream galleries did show an artist of color, they were usually included as tokens, and exhibition reviewers would

[73] *Ibid*
[74] Howardena Pindell, "Breaking the silence: The second in a two-part series on art world racism," Accessed September 27, 2020, https://pindell.mcachicago.org/the-howardena-pindell-papers/breaking-the-silence/
[75] *Ibid*
[76] Howardena Pindell, "Statistics, Testimony, and Supporting Documentation," June 28, 1987, https://pindell.mcachicago.org/art-world-surveys/statistics-testimony-and-supporting-documentation/
[77] *Ibid*

often skip over them.[78] It is then worth noting Pindell's research on New York City galleries in 1986-87; her reference source was *Art in America*, 1987-88 and *Annual Guide to Galleries, Museums, Artists, August* 1987–88.[79] Thirty-nine of these galleries' rosters were composed of 100% white artists; the remaining twenty-four galleries were 69- 95% white.[80]

Moving on to museums, Pindell requested exhibition lists from 1980- present (1987) from the following museums: Brooklyn Museum, Guggenheim Museum, Metropolitan Museum, Museum of Modern Art, Queens Museum, Snug Harbor Museum, Staten Island, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.[81] The Snug museum voluntarily listed their artists of color, but only sent two-and-a-half-year list, and the Queens museum never responded. From 1980- 87, the Brooklyn Museum listed 106 exhibitions in which only two of these exhibitions were one person shows devoted to artists of color. Overall, only 4.71% of the total program included Black artists, and 87.75% focused only on artists of European descent. The Guggenheim listed 73 exhibitions from 1980-87. The total percentage of white artists was 98% as their current exhibition at the time included one artist of color out of 51 total artists. The Metropolitan Museum of Art provided exhibition lists from 1980- 1986. Out of 208 listed exhibitions, there was one, one-person show by an artist of color, and thirty-seven from non-western cultures. This means 2% of all one person shows were represented by artists of color. In addition, artists of color represented 17.78% of the total program, or thirty-seven of 208 exhibitions. The Museum of Modern Art provided select exhibition information from 1980- 1987. The total number of exhibitions listed was 242, out of which only 2 one-person exhibits were by artists of color. This

[78] *Ibid*
[79] "Art in America" Annual Guide to Galleries, Museums, Artists, August 1987–88, p. 121–150.
[80] Howardena Pindell, "STATISTICS, TESTIMONY AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION," Delivered June 28, 1987 at the Agendas for Survival Conference, Hunter College, New York, https://pindell.mcachicago.org/art-world-surveys/statistics-testimony-and-supporting-documentation/
[81] *Ibid*

is only 0.82% of the total program. The Queens museum provided exhibition information from 1980- 1988. The museum listed 129 total shows, only 11 of which featured artists of color or of non-European descent. This is 8.52% of the total program. The Snug Museum only sent exhibition information for 1985- 1987. Over this two-year period, the data provided shows the artist representation at 89.2% white. The Whitney Museum provided exhibition lists from 1980-1987. The overall make-up of the 156 listed exhibitions were 92.95% white.[82]

Moving a decade forward in time, Pindell continued to collect museum statistics from 1986- 1997. Pindell states that following her first statistical review, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funding for visual artists collapsed, as well as the number of grants from New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA).[83] This means public funding for museums became limited, so did the accountability of New York museums, and they began to form relationships with commercial and corporate sectors within the arts.[84] Pindell believes this lack of funding leaves artists of color with even fewer possibilities for exposure and inclusion in exhibitions. Pindell again used the *Art in America* annual for 1996-97 go compare statistics with the decade prior. Only three of the original eight museums which provided information for their 1980-86 exhibitions also provided Pindell with exhibition information from 1986-96. The museums who continued to cooperate were the Brooklyn Museum, the Metropolitan Museum, and Snug Harbor. The Brooklyn Museum provided an exhibition list for 134 shows. Out of these 134 exhibitions, there were 21 concerned with art by artists of color, or non-European cultures.[85] This accounts for 16% of the list. Pindell presented the Metropolitan Museum's exhibition data as

[82] *Ibid*
[83] Howardena Pindell, "Commentary and update of Gallery and Museum Statistics, 1986-1997," https://pindell.mcachicago.org/art-world-surveys/commentary-and-update-of-gallery-and-museum-statistics-1986-1997/
[84] *Ibid*
[85] *Ibid*

percentages of white artists per year. The data was presented as follows: "1986—74%, 1987—81%, 1988—76%, 1989—68%, 1990—70%, 1991—75%, 1992—68%, and in 1993—85% (until May 31)."[86] Out of 60 one-person exhibitions, two were by men of color. Four of them were by White women. Out of a total of 305 exhibitions, 73 were dedicated to non-Western cultures and artists. 75% of the exhibitions were European. Pindell stated the further breakdown of the exhibitions, "36 of the exhibitions were devoted to Asian art, eight to African art, 16 to Middle/Near-Eastern art and antiquities, six to Latin-American art, one to Native American art, four to contemporary art (mixed including one or more artists of color), and two of the exhibitions were devoted to Indigenous People/New Guinea."[87] Concerning traveling exhibitions, 85% were devoted to European or European-American Art. The information provided by the Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art/Snug Harbor was for the years 1989-2000. There were 59 exhibitions during this time, 20 of which will be concerned with artists of color, non-European cultures, or mixed contemporary.[88] This comes to be 34% of the scheduled exhibitions. The Whitney Museum did not respond, but a Guerrilla Girls poster about Whitney Annuals stated that the exhibitions were 89.7% white in 1991, 65.9% white in 1993, and 83.2% white in 1995.[89]

In 2016, two interns at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Maral Gaeeni and Laurel Hauge, continued Pindell's research of New York institutions.[90] The data collected concerned only information about 2016 exhibitions for the Metropolitan Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Museum of Modern Art. The information for the Metropolitan Museum

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[86] *Ibid*
[87] *Ibid*
[88] *Ibid*
[89] *Ibid*
[90] Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, "Current Reports and Call to Contribute," https://pindell.mcachicago.org/art-world-surveys/current-art-world-reports/

includes all their solo and group exhibitions, excluding teen art exhibits or exhibits ephemera. The information for the Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of Modern Art contains all their solo exhibitions. In 2016, 84% of the Metropolitan Museum's solo exhibitions were focused on white artists. There were 28 group exhibitions listed, but they were not able to obtain information on demographics for all the artists. Gaeeni and Hauge note that Pindell stated most group shows have few artists of color despite large numbers of artists represented, and they believe this persists in 2016.[91] However, they did find more shows existed dedicated to artists of color but need to make further examinations.[92] The Brooklyn Museum had five solo shows, four of which were of White artists, and one dedicated to a Black artist. At the Museum of Modern Art, in 2016, 59% of shows were for white artists. The curatorial interns believe most of these were part of a series of shorter projects at the museum, and further examination is required. The belief shared by Pindell concerning representation in group shows is also applied to the group shows at the Brooklyn Museum and Museum of Modern Art.[93]

STAFF

In 2015, the Mellon Foundation created a study on diversity within museum staff. A survey was created to provide reliable data on the demographics of the staff within art museums. The survey was designed by Ithaka S+R. 77% of survey participants came from the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) and 15% came from additional museums that are not part of the AAMD to which the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) distributed the survey.[94] The

[91] Maral Gaeeni, "Art World Race and Gender Survey 2016," 2017, accessed October 26, 2020, https://pindell.mcachicago.org/art-world-surveys/current-art-world-reports/art-world-race-and-gender-survey-2016/
[92] *Ibid*
[93] *Ibid*
[94] Roger Schonfeld, Mariët Westermann, Liam Sweeney, "The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey," The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, July 28, 2015, https://mellon.org/media/filer_public/ba/99/ba99e53a-48d5-4038-80e1-66f9ba1c020e/awmf_museum_diversity_report_aamd_7-28-15.pdf

survey consisted of three components: a spreadsheet with each museum's demographic category in which their staff fell, a survey specifically for HR directors looking at diversity programs, and a survey for museum directors focusing on board diversity and policy.[95] The result of the study shows a shocking lack of diversity. The Non-Hispanic White population made up 84% of curators, conservators, educators, and leadership, a graph of these results may be seen in Figure 4.[96] These positions in which Non-Hispanic whites dominate are a subset of positions associated with higher prestige and educational missions of the museums; in total, 72% of AAMD staff is Non-Hispanic white and 28% belong to underrepresented and marginalized communities.[97] Depending on one's outlook, perhaps this is not a bad percentage, which brings up questions concerning what should the racial distribution look like within museum staff? This subset category of museum jobs is not reflective of the population make up of America. What this does mean is that there are fewer people of color in high-ranking positions in museums, for example among curators, directors, and others. Diversity in staff was not found where it counts, within education and upper administration staff. It must be emphasized that this is the first reliable study concerning race within museum staff in the United States, and it was carried out in 2015. This means much more research needs to be done concerning this issue, as it has been clearly overlooked, if not ignored, in the past.

In 2017, the Andrew W. Mellon foundation, along with the Ithaka S+R, AAMD, and the AAM carried out a case study concerning "the lack of representative diversity in professional

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[95] *Ibid*
[96] Brian Boucher, "Mellon Foundation Study Reveals Uncomfortable Lack of Diversity in American Museums," artnet news, August 4, 2015, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/mellon-foundation-museum-diversity-study-322299
[97] Roger Schonfeld, Mariët Westermann, Liam Sweeney, "The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey," The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, July 28, 2015, https://mellon.org/media/filer_public/ba/99/ba99e53a-48d5-4038-80e1-66f9ba1c020e/awmf_museum_diversity_report_aamd_7-28-15.pdf

museum roles" in response to their 2015 case study.[98] This new study featured the following museums: The Andy Warhol Museum, Brooklyn Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Spelman College Museum (Atlanta), and Studio Museum in Harlem. While this study was meant to look critically at museums and issues of diversity, it also highlights where museums have been successful in their efforts. The eight institutions chosen had high numbers from traditionally underrepresented populations. Site visits were conducted, interviews with staff members from a variety of departments, and other observations were made from meetings, public events, and research. One aspect of this study was to observe the barriers of career engagement placed upon people of color. The hope of the case study was to serve as insight into which museums are doing well in terms of inclusivity and encourage other museum leaders to critically examine themselves and work on their own institution's inclusivity.

The Warhol Museum developed the Diversifying Art Museum Leadership Initiative (DAMLI) through the original Mellon case study on museum staff in 2015. The museum found gaps within their own diversity and chose to examine where they could make improvements and listen to recommendations. The main mission of the initiative is to examine barriers to entries of career engagement for people of color and provide pathways for underrepresented college students within museums. The focus of the program revolved around intern and mentor/supervisor performance, impact on academic and career pathway in the arts and cultural sector, professional and personal competencies, and areas of logistical improvement[99]

[98] "Case Studies in Museum Diversity," The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, January 22, 2018, https://mellon.org/news-blog/articles/case-studies-museum-diversity/

[99] Carlos Arick Moreno, "Diversifying Art Museum Leadership Initiative: 2019 Evaluation Report" The Warhol Museum, 2019

PUBLIC

The public sector of the art museum can be broken into two categories: the relationship of the museum with the public and outreach, and administrative aspects such as price of entrance and membership fees. Reactions of the public are discussed in the above sections concerning the Whitney showing of *Open Casket*, and public reaction to *Harlem on My Mind*. In Spring of 2020, I worked as an intern in the development department of the Brooklyn Museum in New York. One of my tasks was to research membership prices of prominent museums across New York, in late 2019- early 2020, and the rest of the country to see how the Brooklyn Museum compared. The use of this data was to examine if the Brooklyn Museum should adjust their prices accordingly. Collected are membership prices from 43 museums, primarily in New York but a few institutions from across America.[100] Admission prices to museums already deter those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to partake in museum visits. As a perk to becoming a member of a museum, most institutions do not require admission fees from those that pay an annual membership fee. The average cost of individual membership, on the lowest tier, between the 43 institutions is $81. Marginalized groups are more likely to experience "multidimensional poverty" and unemployment than white counterparts.[101] This means that marginalized communities are less likely to visit and engage with art museums based solely on economic factors. Those with more money are able to become members of the museum which in turn grants them access to special treatment such as private exhibition openings, free tickets, and the like.

[100] Kenzie Grogan, "NYC Museum Memberships," Brooklyn Museum Excel Document, 2020
[101] "Ethnic and Racial Minorities & Socioeconomic Status," American Psychological Association, July 2017, https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/minorities

Figure 1

[102]

Figure 2


[103]

[102] Holland Cotter, "What I Learned From a Disgraced Art Show on Harlem," New York Times, August19, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/20/arts/design/what-i-learned-from-a-disgraced-art-show-on-harlem.html
[103] Lorena Muñoz-Alonso, "Dana Schutz's Painting of Emmett Till at Whitney Biennial Sparks Protest," artnet news, March 21, 2017, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/dana-schutz-painting-emmett-till-whitney-biennial-protest-897929

Figure 3

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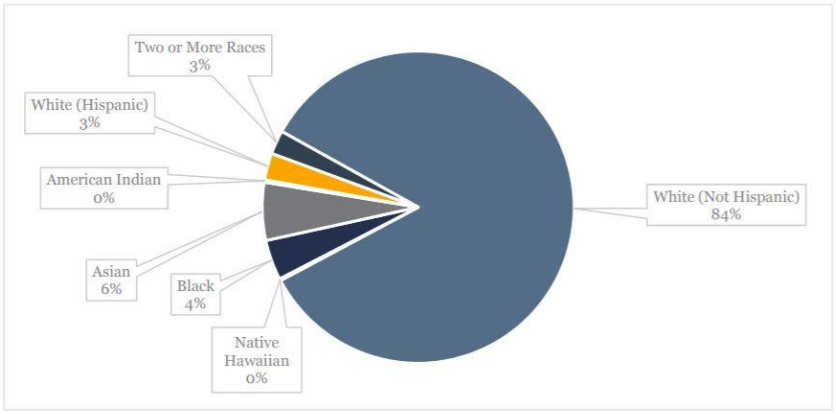
Figure 4

Figure 6 Race and Ethnicity (Curators, Conservators, Educators and Leadership Only)



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[104] https://www.howardenapindell.org/

[105] Roger Schonfeld, Mariët Westermann, Liam Sweeney, "The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey," The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, July 28, 2015, https://mellon.org/media/filer_public/ba/99/ba99e53a-48d5-4038-80e1-66f9ba1c020e/awmf_museum_diversity_report_aamd_7-28-15.pdf

Figure 5

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[106] Stephanie Eckardt, "The Protests and Reactions to Dana Schutz's Painting of Emmett Till in the 2017 Whitney Biennial," W Magazine, March 22, 2017, https://www.wmagazine.com/story/dana-schutz-painting-emmitt-till-whitney-biennial-protests/

Chapter 3

Survey of Austin Art Institutions in 2020

In this chapter, I observe four Austin art institutions and their diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and practices, specifically regarding African American artists and other artists of color. The institutions studied are The Contemporary Austin, Blanton Museum of Art, George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural and Genealogy Center, and Mexic-Arte Museum. This text is not meant to deprecate the institutions, but to look critically at them as case studies for the issue of race, specifically Black artists, and communities of color, within the Austin art scene.

THE CONTEMPORARY AUSTIN

The Contemporary Austin is composed of two locations: The Jones Center in downtown Austin, and Laguna Gloria, an art-in-nature site consisting of the landmark Driscoll Villa, Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park, and Art School.[107] The Jones Center opened to the public in 1998, later changing its name to Arthouse at the Jones Center. Meanwhile Laguna Gloria Art Museum was founded in 1961, later becoming the Austin Museum of Art in 1996. The two separate entities merged in 2011 to become The Contemporary Austin.[108] According to the museum's website, their mission reads as follows, "The Contemporary Austin reflects the spectrum of contemporary art through exhibitions, commissions, education, and the collection."[109] In my research of the museum, I interviewed two members of the staff, Abby Mechling, Director of Education, and Jane Hyeon, Human Resources Manager and lead on the museum's new Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) initiative. While speaking with Mechling, who has been at the museum for ten years, I was surprised to find out the

[107] About Page, The Contemporary Austin, accessed April 8, 2021, http://thecontemporaryaustin.org/about/#content-page-2
[108] *Ibid*
[109] *Ibid*

museum previously had no formal DEAI initiative in place.[110] Despite no formal initiative, Mechling did say DEIA is something she pays attention to in her hiring practices, and the Education Department works to make the museum inclusive through programs like Seeing Special Things. This program is an educational initiative aimed towards Title 1 schools, those with low-income enrollment of 75% or more. These schools are in zip codes that are not seen visiting the museum on their own.[111] Seeing Special Things invites children from these areas to the museum's locations, as well as makes site visits to the schools, to incorporate art and broaden access into the students' lives and create a mutual exchange between the museum and lower income neighborhoods. The museum also offers the Second Saturday program, free of charge for families to come and complete art activities at Laguna Gloria.[112] Mechling hopes that the external Educational programs will create a long-term change in the museum but is hoping that an internalized DEI initiative on the staff and board level of the museum will "help us get there quicker."[113] When speaking with Mechling, I brought up the controversial post on Change the Museum, an Instagram account which is "pressuring US museums to move beyond lip service proclamations by amplifying tales of unchecked racism."[114] The account allows people to anonymously submit their experiences within museums, some specifically named, others not. The Contemporary Austin was named in a post in August of 2020.[115] The post states as follows:

[110] Abby Mechling, Director of Education at The Contemporary Austin interview by Kenzie Grogan, November 18, 2020
[111] *Ibid*
[112] *Ibid*
[113] *Ibid*
[114] Change the Museum (@changethemuseum), accessed April 8, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/changethemuseum/?hl=en
[115] Change the Museum (@changethemuseum), Instagram Photo, August 15, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CD7QhxLlh4k/

> I was interviewing for a curatorial assistant position at The Contemporary, and I said I had a focus on Latino art. The interviewing curator said that's not what they concentrate on and that the culturally-specific institutions within the city handled enough of that kind of artwork.[116]

While this concerns another underrepresented community within the art world, it shows a deep issue in the museum as the existing focus of Latinx art was identified by the interviewing curator as not compatible with the artwork shown at the museum. Mechling believes the museum is ready to engage with conversation concerning this post. She stated, "we should do better" and "part of this is owning up to what people think of us."[117] The new director of the museum, Sharon Maidenberg, addressed the post in an interview. She stated she "wasn't shocked" and that "Equity has to start internally."[118] The Contemporary was presented with an opportunity to onboard an aspiring curator to represent an area of contemporary art that the museum is lacking in. Yet instead, the interviewer created an adverse reaction that implied Latinx art is not compatible with the Contemporary's gallery space. My interview with Jane Hyeon, who has been at the museum since April of 2020, did not provide as much insight to the new DEIA initiative as I would have liked, but I believe this is because it is new and not fully developed. I did learn that the museum will be hiring two external DEIA consultants, local to Austin, to work with both the staff and Board of Trustees. Hyeon stated "it doesn't work if one group [the hierarchy of staff] is kind of out of sync with the other or… the expectations are different."[119] The consultants will start with a research phase, look at the museum, data, and interview

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[116] *Ibid*
[117] Abby Mechling, Director of Education at The Contemporary Austin, interview by Kenzie Grogan, November 18, 2020
[118] Jeanne Claire van Ryzin, "An Instagram post sparks intense debate about equity in Austin's art world," Sightlines, September 20, 2020 https://sightlinesmag.org/an-instagram-post-sparks-intense-debate-about-equity-in-austins-art-world
[119] Jane Hyeon, Human Resources Manager at The Contemporary Austin, interview by Kenzie Grogan, November 2, 2020

employees. Hyeon stated that this process would begin around a month after we spoke, (our conversation took place in early November of 2020). She explained that it would be a long-term process, and things will not be perfect immediately. It was clear from our time together that Hyeon was adamant in making intentional changes and not seem performative actions that appear "just an exercise." She is also very passionate about hiring a diverse staff and making the museum more accessible.[120]

Along with speaking to staff, I researched The Contemporary's exhibition history and admission fees. To examine past artists and exhibitions, I took to the museum's website.[121] Some artist information was not available publicly, so for this reason, my total exhibition data does not include the group exhibitions, *Special Blend*, 2015, *Music for Wilderness Lake*, 2014, and *Advanced Young Artists*, 2014. In the counted exhibitions, there were four artists I was not able to find public information on, and therefore they are not included in the count. After the deductions, there have so far been 140 artists exhibited since the creation of The Contemporary Austin, and presently listed on the website. Out of 140, 75% of exhibited artists have been white. Only 9.29% have been Black, and 5% Latinx. The website reveals that Deborah Roberts' current solo show, *I'm*, is only the third solo exhibition ever held by the museum representing an African diaspora or African American artist. The museum is also listing Deborah Roberts' *Little Man, Little Man* installation as an exhibition, as well as Jim Hodges' *With Liberty and Justice for All (A Work in Progress).* The Contemporary's Museum without Walls program, located at Perry Park, currently exhibits three artists, all of them being white. According to the museum's website, the "Perry Art Park project is a partnership with the neighborhood group Friends of

[120] *Ibid*
[121] Exhibitions Page, The Contemporary Austin, accessed April 8, 2021, https://thecontemporaryaustin.org/exhibitions/

Perry Park and the City of Austin's Parks and Recreation Department to create a small-scale sculpture park in Perry Neighborhood Park."[122] Currently, at Laguna Gloria there are twenty-four artists on view, this number includes individual members of the collective Superflex counted as individuals. Out of these twenty-four, there are three artists of color, and twenty-one white artists. Out of the three artists of color, only one of them is a Black artist. The museum's group exhibition numbers are similar. A total of nine group exhibitions have taken place over the years, with a total of 74 counted artists. Out of the 74, 52 were white.

The Contemporary Austin does require the purchase of a ticket to view artwork. Adults may purchase a ticket for $10 and Seniors and Students may purchase one for $5. Those that are members, under the age of 18, part of the military, or essential workers (a result of the COVID-19 pandemic) may enter for free.[123] Becoming a member of the museum allows for level-specific special access. There are 8 total levels; the least expensive membership fee is $50 at the 'Individual' level. The most expensive is that of the 'Leader' at $10,000.[124]

BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

The Blanton Museum of Art, located on the grounds of The University of Texas at Austin, was founded in 1963, then known as the University Art Museum. The museum self-identifies as the "largest and most comprehensive collection of art in Central Texas," with a collection of art spanning from "European paintings, an encyclopedic collection of prints and drawings, and modern and contemporary American and Latin American art."[125] The late founder and first director, Donald B. Goodall, assembled one of the largest collections of Latin American

[122] Museum Without Walls at Perry Park, The Contemporary Austin, accessed April 8, 2021, https://thecontemporaryaustin.org/exhibitions/museum-without-walls-at-perry-park/
[123] Hours and Admission, The Contemporary Austin, accessed April 8, 2021, https://thecontemporaryaustin.org/visit/#admission
[124] Membership, The Contemporary Austin, accessed April 8, 2021, https://thecontemporaryaustin.org/support/membership/
[125] About, Blanton Museum of Art, accessed April 8, 2021, https://blantonmuseum.org/about/

art in the United States.[126] According to the museum website, the Blanton is "the primary art collection for the city of Austin" and has more than 19,000 works in its collection. In my research of the Blanton, I spoke with the current Director of Education, Siobhán McCusker. She has been with the museum for six years and is the leader of the University Audiences program. In addition, I received written information from Dalia Azim, Manager of Special Projects, and co-lead on the museum's DEAI Assessment and Evaluation Team, which McCusker is also a part of. Azim laid out the museum's Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion initiative for me, which is put in place by the University's Office for Inclusion and Equity, the web link which can be found in the footnotes.[127]

Following the murder of George Floyd, the Blanton created a section on their website titled Race and Social Justice in Art.[128] The section contains 10 chapters, highlighting artists, exhibitions, and programs throughout the museum's history that have to do with the topics of racism and social justice. The introduction of the page states that the museum "hope[s] this content and other core offerings at our museum… will foster meaningful dialogue about race and inequity."[129] The following pages on their Race and Social Justice section feature Vincent Valdez, Maria Hinojosa, Charles White, Lily Cox-Richard, Kambui Olujimi, Joiri Minaya, Diedrick Brackens, and the 2015 exhibition *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties*. Also included is the symposium hosted by the museum in 2018, *Facing Racism: Art and Action*.[130] The symposium was held in conjunction with the exhibition of Vincent Valdez' piece entitled

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[126] Myrna Oliver, "Donald Goodall; Art Educator, Museum Official," Los Angeles Times, October 31, 1997, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1997-oct-31-me-48634-story.html
[127] The Office for Inclusion and Equity, The University of Texas at Austin, accessed April 8, 2021, https://equity.utexas.edu/about-oie/
[128] "Race and Social Justice in Art," Introduction, Blanton Museum of Art, accessed April 8, 2021, https://blantonmuseum.org/chapter/introduction-14/
[129] *Ibid*
[130] "Race and Social Justice in Art," Chapter 2: Facing Racism: Art and Action, Blanton Museum of Art, accessed April 8, 2021, https://blantonmuseum.org/chapter/facing-racism-art-and-action/

The City. Perhaps the Blanton's most provocative exhibition to date, *The City* is comprised multiple painted canvases showing a Ku Klux Klan gathering overlooking a metropolis. While referencing historic photographs through the black-and-white palette, the painting is made contemporary through items like the iPhone and new modern-day truck.[131] I remember encountering the piece for the first time while visiting the museum for class research. It left me feeling unsettled, frightened, and wanting to leave as quickly as I came in. From the symposium, I found curator Janet Dees' presentation on ways in which artist-activists have fought racism throughout art history compelling. She raised questions, also brought up by the Blanton, concerning how to show compassion for those viewing challenging works, as it is both an intellectually and emotionally charged experience, for everyone who may view them, not just audiences of color. Dees presented two artworks which are meant to encourage discussion on how issues of race inform how we analyze art, and how racism informs spaces in which we practice art history, including universities and museums.[132] I spoke about the relationship between UT Austin, the Blanton, and race with McCusker during our conversation. McCusker works with student access programs at the University, specifically she works with the Office of the Dean of Students. This includes working with 1st generation students, underrepresented student populations, students on probation, and more. She brings these undergraduates, who may have never set foot into a gallery space, into the museum and tries to tailor their experience to parallel and reflect their experience at UT. The idea is to tease out a sense of belonging, relevance, and purpose with a work of art. Located on the Race and Social Justice page is a chapter dedicated to curriculum and lesson plans for teachers to use with their students to discuss

[131] "Vincent Valdez: The City," Chapter 1: About the Art, Blanton Museum of Art, accessed April 8, 2021, http://blantonmuseum.org/chapter/about-the-art/
[132] "Facing Racism: Art & Action – Janet Dees," Blanton Museum of Art, YouTube, June 5, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mmdy89PZXg8&feature=emb_logo

the Civil Rights Movement and racism.[133] McCusker noted that sometimes UT policy hinders the museum and believes the policy could be shifted to be more appropriate to student experiences. Being attached to a University allows a greater flow of knowledge, and those working at the museum are able to learn from students and faculty which allows the museum itself to expand and grow; the benefit is greater than the constraint.[134]

The museum's vast collection does not include an area specifically for African or African Diaspora art, while it does have sections for Modern and Contemporary, Latin American Art, Prints and Drawings, European Paintings, Ancient Art, and the William J. Battle Collection of Plaster Casts.[135] This, however, does not mean there are no African American or Black artists within the permanent collection. For example, in Modern and Contemporary art you may find the work entitled *Madam C.J. Walker* by Sonya Clark, or *Barbara Jordan* by Carl Dixon. But as I learned from McCusker, where the museum's permanent collection may lack in diversity, traveling exhibitions make up for. I was surprised when looking at the Blanton's exhibition history to find representation from cultures and people across the globe. I decided to look at the museum's exhibition history from the past 10 years, a similar span of time Howardena Pindell observed in her research in 1986 and 1997. There are a total of 88 exhibitions, past and present, in this time frame. Unlike the Contemporary, individual artists are not listed for every exhibition, so it was not possible to collect artist demographics as specifically. There are a total of 9 exhibitions, 10%, featuring work explicitly by African diaspora and African American artists. This does not mean there were no other Black or African American artists in other exhibitions.

[133] "Race and Social Justice in Art," Chapter 4: Curriculum: Doing Social Justice, Blanton Museum of Art, accessed April 8, 2021, https://blantonmuseum.org/chapter/curriculum-doing-social-justice/
[134] Siobhán McCusker, Director of Education at the Blanton Museum of Art, interview by Kenzie Grogan on February 26, 2021
[135] Collections, Blanton Museum of Art, accessed April 8, 2021 https://collection.blantonmuseum.org/

One of the current exhibitions, O*ff the Walls: Gifts from Professor John A. Robertson*, features 8 artists on the website, 2 of which are Black artists. *Come as You Are: Art of the 1990s,* 2016, was a group exhibition of over 45 artists. Of the 14 artists featured on its page, 3 were Black artists, and 5 others were artists of color. *Overture: New Ways of Seeing The Blanton Collection*, 2011, contained over 57 works, spanning many centuries and continents. There are 12 artists featured on the page, 3 are artists of color, and nine are white. *About Face: Portraiture as Subject,* 2011, lists 14 artists, 5 of which are artists of color, the rest white. The Blanton is known for their Latin American collection. A total of 19 exhibitions were dedicated to work from Latin America and Latinx artists. That is 21.6% of the rotating exhibitions and artwork. Like before with African and African American artists, there are other exhibitions that include the work of Latinx artists. *Impressionism and the Caribbean: Francisco Oller and His Transatlantic World*, 2015 featured a European genre of Impressionism, but focused mainly on Puerto Rican artist, Francisco Oller. *Cubism Beyond Borders*, 2013, concentrated on France, the Americas, and Eastern Europe. *Luminous: 50 years of Collecting Prints and Drawings at the Blanton*, 2013, concerned Latin America, North America, and Europe. There are a total of 12 exhibitions solely relating to European art, that is 13.6% of the total exhibitions. Outside of this 12, there are 19 exhibitions, 21.6%, only featuring White artists. Including the exhibitions listed before with mixtures of representation, there are 10 exhibitions representing more than one nationality, race, or location. There are only 2 exhibitions, 2.3%, featuring Asian artists alone, and 8 exhibitions, 9.1%, featuring artists outside of being White, European, or Black. In addition, there were 8 exhibitions, 9.1%, that I could not find specific artist information on.

The Blanton holds a $12 admission fee for Adults, $10 fee for Seniors, $5 for Youth (13-21) and $5 for Student (Non-UT). Children (12 and under), members, K-12 Teachers and Non-

UT College Faculty, UT Faculty/Staff, UT Students, and Military affiliates may access the museum for free.[136]

MEXIC-ARTE MUSEUM

Mexic-Arte Museum was founded in 1983, by Sylvia Orozco, Sam Coronado, and Pio Pulido, in downtown Austin with the mission to share the art and culture of Mexico with the community.[137] Mexic-Arte is one of the few Mexican/Latinx museums in the nation, in addition to the Association of Hispanic art in New York City, the National Museum of Mexican art in Chicago, the Mexican Museum in San Francisco, and El Museo del Barrio in New York. Through exhibitions, educational programs, and special events, the museum is dedicated to preserving and teaching Mexican/Latinx and Latinx/Chicanx art and culture. Mexic-Arte fills an educational gap within art, representation, and history, in the United States. As an ethnocentric museum, its exhibition history does not serve as useful as the Blanton's and Contemporary's as Mexic-Arte has declared in their mission their dedication to an underrepresented community in the arts. Their mission reads as follows:

> The Mexic-Arte Museum is dedicated to enriching the community through education programs, exhibitions, and the collection, preservation, and interpretation of Mexican, Latino, and Latin American art and culture for visitors of all ages.[138]

Despite being committed to one realm of the arts, ethnocentric museums are not excused from diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. I spoke with Dr. George Vargas, Curator and Director of Programs, who has been with the museum since March 2020, to understand how the museum considers diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. Vargas speaks to the museum's

[136] Timed Admissions Tickets, Blanton Museum of Art, accessed April 8, 2021, https://54061.blackbaudhosting.com/54061/Timed-Admissions-Tickets-26Mar2021
[137] About Page, Mexic-Arte Museum, accessed April 8, 2021, https://mexic-artemuseum.org/about/
[138] *Ibid*

diversity, mentioning the most recent El Mero Muro muralists Niz, Sadé Lawson, and Christin Apodoca, who are all women and respectively Peruvian American, African American, and Mexican/Chicana American.[139] This diversity and representation is something Vargas pays attention to personally, whether there is a stated DEAI plan or not. In reference to inclusion, the most recent, *37th Annual Day of the Dead Exhibition*, exhibited a number different racial and ethnic groups, including not only Mexican/Mexican American and Chicanx, but also White artists. Vargas states it is important to include as many diverse racial ethnic groups as possible in their exhibitions because "our doors are open to anybody and everybody of all ages and races and ethnicities."[140] In terms of outreach, the museum has been able to reach more diverse audiences through online events and zoom presentations. Vargas stresses further that "It's always been my professional goal, as an educator… to reach out to diverse cultures through what we do through exhibitions and programs."[141] The issue of racism within museums in personal to Vargas, as he has dealt with discrimination and prejudice at all levels within the art museum field, having previously worked in cities such as Detroit, Chicago, El Paso, and now Austin. Vargas has a background in racial and ethnic studies, and this struggle has fueled his passion for "opening the doors" to those "underrepresented and underserved" through his work.[142] He also believes that mainstream museums are obliged, morally and ethically, to deal with the issue of racism within the museum and resolve it without outside pressure. Although, he notes that it is often the reaction of the public which forces museums to make modifications. Austin mainstream museums have been made aware of the public outcry, but Vargas states they "hesitate for various

[139] Dr. George Vargas, Curator and Director of Programs at Mexic-Arte Museum, interview by Kenzie Grogan on February 25, 2021
[140] *Ibid*
[141] *Ibid*
[142] *Ibid*

reasons to move forward and advance affirmative action, equal opportunity, diversity, and inclusion."[143] Vargas believes change must come from the museum's board, directors, and the curator to generate real change. He believes change must also occur in universities across the nation. There must be an effort to recruit, educate, and train women and people of color to enter the art field. Both institutions, the museum, and the average American university, have failed to advance affirmative action and equal opportunity by the lack of recruitment of women and people of color, especially in the arts.[144] For example, in 2019 at UT Austin, only 3.9% of students in the Department of Art and Art History were Black.[145] In 2010, this percent was 3.5%.[146] Very little change occurred in the nine years in between these two counts. Vargas wrote an article that speaks to this issue, titled "Into the Crucible of Change: Progress and Challenges in 21st Century Chicana/o Art."[147] In the article, Dr. Vargas notes a transformation that has occurred in the hiring of women in museums. This is progress in one sense, but museums are mostly hiring White women, and still failing to hire women of color. I inquired to Vargas if any mainstream museums reach out to Mexic-Arte, or him personally, to consult on exhibitions or diversification. He informed me that the Contemporary and Blanton have reached out to him before. Vargas also spoke about the organization Texas Talks Art, put together by the Blanton. He was asked to participate by a curator at the Blanton and he feels the invitation is very sincere. The organization is allowing Vargas to decide which artists he would like to interview for 30 minutes. He will be interviewing Michael Anthony Garcia and Jose Villalobos who both deal with social political issues within their work.

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[143] *Ibid*
[144] *Ibid*
[145] Fall 2010 and 2019 UG Demographic Info by Major, The University Texas at Austin, accessed April 8, 2021, https://utexas.app.box.com/s/tg8wzii9soejvwdg1fpom527zl5hv4pq
[146] *Ibid*
[147] George Vargas, "Into the Crucible of Change: Progress and Challenges in 21st Century Chicana/o Art," *istor 75 Revista De Historia Internacional* (2019)

Mexic-Arte took a prominent stance following the murder of George Floyd. The museum released a statement of solidarity on social media, as seen in Figure 1. The museum's social media content changed drastically concerning Black Lives Matter and uplifting Black artists. The sixth months prior to the murder of George Floyd, from November 24, 2019 – May 24, 2020, there were a total of zero posts related to this social issue out of a total 193 posts on Facebook and 87 posts on Instagram. There were 4 posts related to the topic on Twitter out of 253, 1.58%. The sixth months following the event, from May 25, 2020 – November 25, 2020, there was a noticeable increase. There is a total of 17 out of 260 Facebook posts, 6.54%, 12 out of 188 Instagram posts, 6.38%, and 36 out of 292 Twitter posts, 12.33%. In August 2020, Mexic-Arte commissioned artists Niz and Sadé Lawson as part of the El Mero Muro project to paint a mural entitled *Vote* (see Figure 2). The mural depicts two women of color, one holding a sign that declares 'VOTE' and the other a sign stating, 'BLACK LIVES MATTER.' Across the top of the mural are the words 'UNITY' 'ARTISTS MAKE CHANGE' and 'EQUALITY.' The mural is located on the outside wall of Mexic-Arte on the corner of Congress Ave. and 5th street in downtown Austin. Artist Niz made the statement, "We wanted to express solidary among women of color and inspire women of color to vote."[148] According to Vargas, "The Mexic-Arte Museum wanted to support the Black Lives Matter movement; it is our responsibility as a cultural institution to use our influence to aid in the amplification of the voices of the historically unheard, and uplift a message of solidarity."[149] Furthermore, in August, the museum hosted a panel discussion, *Puente de Arte* (Art Bridge), a conversation on racism within the art

[148] John-Carlos Estrada (@Mr_JCE) "With #EarlyVoting starting, you might see this reminder in downtown Austin at 5th & Congress," Twitter, October 12, 2020, https://twitter.com/Mr_JCE/status/1315777352794857472
[149] Dr. George Vargas gave permission to quote on March 14, 2021.

community.[150] The panel included guest speakers Dr. Cherise Smith, Tammie Rubin, Elaina Brown-Spence, Dr. Cary Cordova and Mexic-Arte Museum Development Coordinator Danielle Houtkooper as moderator. Mexic-Arte also offers a program called Changarrito/Changarreando Artist of the Month. This is an artist residency program in which any artist of any background may apply and take over Mexic-Arte's Instagram account for a month. The program was conceptualized by Maximo Gonzalez and consists of a physical art vending cart as an alternative to the official museum space.[151] Vargas has opened the program, as it was originally dedicated to emerging artists. But this brought up questions of who the museum serves if their audience is diverse. He is now including young emerging artists, as well as established and professionalized artists, and is now looking at senior artists.

The museum provides free tours on Sundays. You may request a tour in Spanish if desired. Admission for Adults is $7, Seniors are $4, Students $4, and ages 12 and under are $1. Members of the museum need not pay admission.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER MUSEUM, CULTURAL AND GENEAOLOGY CENTER

The George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural and Genealogy Center is located in East Austin, Texas, an increasingly gentrified part of the city. The history of the museum begins in 1926, on 9th and Guadalupe St., in a small house that once served as Austin's first library.[152] Residents of East Austin at this time, primarily where people of color presided, demanded a library of their own. So, in 1933, the first building was moved to its current location on Angelina

[150] "Puente de Arte Panel Discussion: A Conversation on Racism within the Art Community," Mexic-Arte Museum, YouTube, August 28, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PH-m6SVnang
[151] Mexic-Arte Museum (@mexic_arte) "Our Changarrito/Changarreando application is now online!" Instagram Photo, October 6, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CGAjtczlKM0/
[152] About Page, George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural and Genealogy Center, accessed April 8, 2021, http://www.austintexas.gov/page/george-washington-carver-museum-cultural-and-genealogy-center-about

Street.[153] This branch of the library was referred to as the "Colored Branch" until it received the name George Washington Carver Branch Library in 1947. As the library and collection grew throughout the years, a need for a new and larger facility also grew. In 1979, a new facility was built next to the original. As a result of this, Austin's first library and later first branch library, was transformed into the George Washington Carver Museum and Cultural Center in 1980.[154] This would be the first African American neighborhood museum in Texas. The Carver Museum was born out of community efforts and engagement to promote African American history and achievement in the city of Austin, and in turn the nation. The museum today is 36,000 square feet and includes four galleries, a conference room, classroom, darkroom, dance studio, 134-seat theatre, and archival space.[155] The museum's mission is as follows: "Through the preservation and exhibition of African American material culture, history, and aesthetic expression, the Carver Museum works to create a space where the global contributions of all Black people are celebrated. We accomplish this by telling stories about our local community and connecting those histories to larger narratives about Blackness."[156] The four galleries feature a permanent exhibit on African American families, and Artists' Gallery, a children's exhibit on African American scientists and inventors, and a core exhibit titled *The African American Presence in 19th Century Texas*.[157] There is no admission fee to visit the museum.

I spoke with Carre Adams, Lead Curator and Culture and Arts Education Manager, to gain insight on how a museum that is devoted to people of African descent goes about diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. Adams shared with me that, for the Carver Museum, DEAI

[153] *Ibid*
[154] *Ibid*
[155] *Ibid*
[156] *Ibid*
[157] *Ibid*

"is really around all of the other intersecting pieces of identity that live inside of Black bodies."[158] He noted there is no formal "plan" written down concerning this, but that the staff is frequently in conversation about.[159] These intersecting pieces include the proportion of men to women artists, artists who identify as LGBTQ+, those that are multicultural or biracial, and other means of personal identification. Adams went on to say their work is more about equity; for example, making sure artists are paid for their work that is exhibited. The museum does not want to limit exhibited artists based on who has access to resources. We then moved on to discuss how the Carver holds itself accountable. Adams stated that as a publicly funded museum, they have many accountability measures. One of these measures is community engagement. The museum has an annual community engagement process, which they have already met for this fiscal year as they have been in the process of completing a "master plan."[160] They are referring to this plan as a facility expansion plan, which has included about a dozen small focus groups where community members were able to give critical feedback about the museum. The Carver also has an affinity group, known as the George Washington Carver ambassadors. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Adams met with this group monthly to report on the work the museum has been doing. The museum is also close partners with Six Square, Austin's Black Cultural District.[161] They are also part of the Black Leaders Collective.[162] These relationships create community accountability for the Carver Museum to "do right, by people and organizations and community."[163] Some of the feedback from the community concerned challenges of using the

[158] Carre Adams, Lead Curator/Culture and Arts Education Manager at the George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural and Genealogy Center, interview by Kenzie Grogan on January 20, 2021
[159] *Ibid*
[160] *Ibid*
[161] Six Square, Austin's Black Cultural District, accessed April 8, 2021, https://www.sixsquare.org/
[162] Black Leaders Collective, accessed April 8, 2021, https://www.blackleaderscollectiveatx.com/
[163] Carre Adams, Lead Curator/Culture and Arts Education Manager at the George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural and Genealogy Center, interview by Kenzie Grogan on January 20, 2021

facility's free and paid spaces because of operating hours, fees, or the number of spaces available. Adams stated that the museum's hours are more geared towards tourism or weekend city-visitors, and not to the traditional working hours of those in the community. The Curator also hopes to update and make branding consistent when new programs are developed, as well as eventually renovate the theater. A final thought from the community concerned how the Carver was displaying local African American history and culture. Adams lamented "folks feeling like the story of Black Austin does not live in this space."[164] The museum has works of art to create and develop this story for visitors while putting it in conversation with a "national timeline", and this is something Adams is actively working on.[165] I asked if the responsibility to tell the story of Black Austin lay in other museums and cultural institutions as well. Adams expressed that "institutions that are publicly funded really need to address the concerns and the priorities of the communities that are their community's accountability."[166] He believes if institutions have it within their "capacity," meaning space, talent, skill, ability, imagination, etc., then they should take on this responsibility.[167] In addition, he believes museums need to be explicit in what their limitations are when taking on these challenges, and to be able to complete what they set out to accomplish.

Adams and I transitioned to speak about the response of cultural institutions to the Black Lives Matter movement, specifically the performativity of institutions releasing solidarity statements. Adams believes it is performative of these institutions, if they are not allocating money, time, and resources to achieve equity. There needs to be a deep understanding and commitment within those in leadership positions to make these changes. Adams appreciated

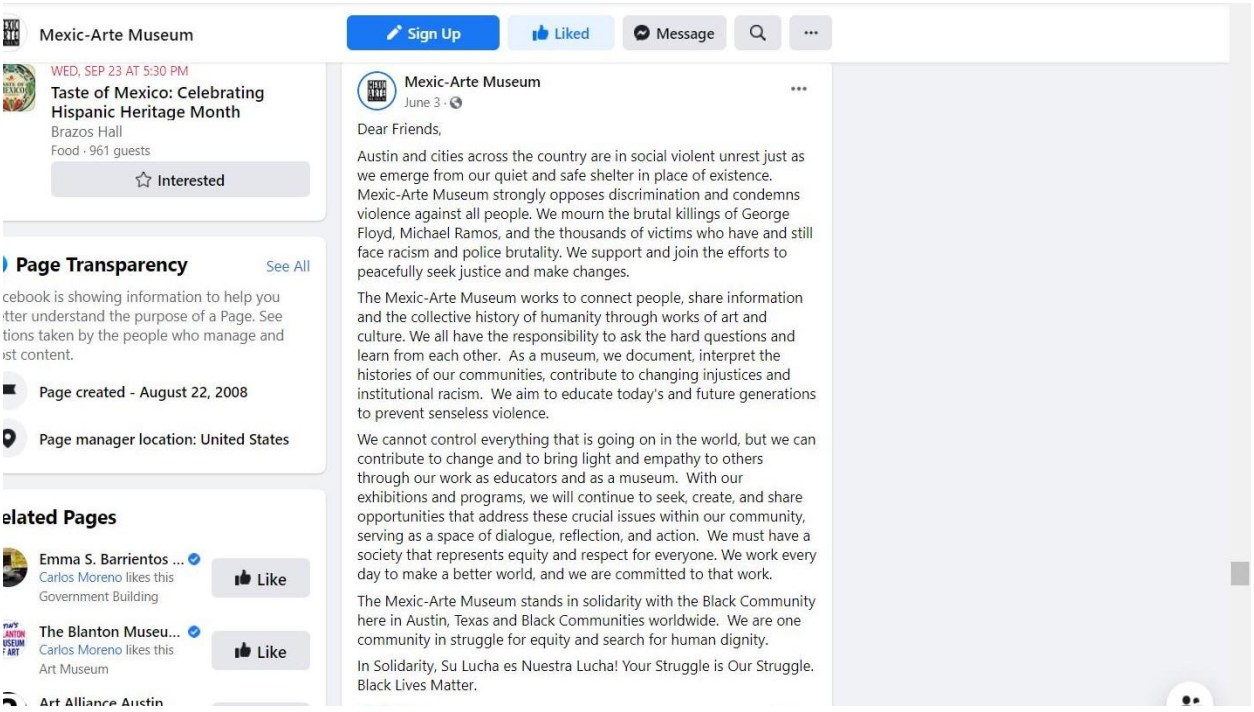
[164] *Ibid*
[165] *Ibid*
[166] *Ibid*
[167] *Ibid*

statements that laid out specific steps they were going to take to make changes, whether it be the setup of a fund, committing to exhibit a certain percent of Black artists or artists of color, or hiring people to make this happen. He went on to say that the statements are performative because Black Lives Matter is not new; "It's not like BLM just happened, right… we have to watch a man die for seven minutes for you to make a statement of solidarity."[168] It will always be performative if the institutions releasing these statements need to be pressured to do so. Adams believes that museums should be a place for the public to exchange and engage with ideas about democracy, art, and culture. He believes artists are critical and "museums should have already been there," reckoning with the reality of American history.[169] Exhibitions concerning this topic require funding, and Adams does not believe the Carver would receive the funding needed to produce such a project. He stated that places such as the Blanton would receive funding to do so, and he often is brought on as a consultant by institutions, primarily in Austin, who receive this money. He says it can be disheartening, and often it is assumed he will contribute his time for the love of the culture, and not offered compensation for his time. It is an issue of valuing Black labor and contribution. I went on to ask about visitor demographics, which Adams stated they do not collect. Based off his observations while doing gallery checks, most visitors are Black, but not by a large difference[170]. The Carver also has several education programs and summer camps that reach out to Austin's Black youth. A prominent upcoming program, at the time we spoke, was a partnership with MINDPOP to become a vendor with Austin Independent School District where the museum will give students a break from traditional curriculum in the middle of the school day.[171] Adams' closing remarks reflected sentiments from the scholars of *Puente de Arte*

[168] *Ibid*
[169] *Ibid*
[170] *Ibid*
[171] MINDPOP, accessed April 8, 2021, https://www.mindpop.org/

in that institutions much be "prepared to be honest about who they serve… who they're thinking about, and who they're not thinking about when they're doing their work."[172] Progress and meaningful conversations for equity in museums will only be possible once museums are first truthful internally. Adams believes that for institutions that are affinity specific, like the Carver, must take up space unapologetically, "to fill a deficit that exists," and that as an institution "we still have our own equity work to do."[173]

Figure 1



[172] Carre Adams, Lead Curator/Culture and Arts Education Manager at the George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural and Genealogy Center, interview by Kenzie Grogan on January 20, 2021
[173] Carre Adams, Lead Curator/Culture and Arts Education Manager at the George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural and Genealogy Center, interview by Kenzie Grogan on January 20, 2021

Figure 2


UNITY
ARTISTS MAKE CHANGE
EQUALITY
VOTE
BLACK LIVES MATTER!
#ELMEROMURO
@elenizzle
FEW & FAR.

Conclusion

It has now been almost an exact year since the murder of George Floyd as I conclude this thesis. The murderer has since been convicted, which created a surge in public statements from museums, as we saw in May of 2020. The Contemporary Austin released the following statement in the wake of the prosecution of Derek Chauvin:

> We stand with George Floyd, his family, and the Black Lives Matter movement. This week's verdict represents a much-too-long-awaited, very welcome first step toward accountability. We are relieved and find cause for hope and faith in our fellow humans. We continue, however, to be heartbroken for the family of George Floyd and by the continued targeting of our black and brown allies. Black Lives Matter.[174]

The release of this statement shows the cyclical nature of the actions that arose a year ago concerning institutions releasing statements of solidarity during times of public interest.

Reflecting on my research process, I was met with some challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic made it not possible to visit all the institutions in person, and scheduling virtual interviews was difficult and required much patience and persistence. In most cases, information I wished to acquire was not readily available, whether the museums did not have it or did not want to release it. For example, when I requested staff and visitor demographics. What became apparent though, is that none of the museums, with exception of the Blanton as they are part of UT Austin, have a formal DEAI initiative or statement. Those I spoke with seemed confident in their respective institution's efforts to make progress and support BIPOC communities. The museums will have to continue to demonstrate their dedication towards DEAI in the future when public buzz has decreased.

[174] The Contemporary Austin, Instagram Photo and Caption, April 22, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CN-L3msHO_O/

The questions brought up in my introduction are mostly left unanswered; it is too soon to see if real change is taking place. The four Austin institutions in question will have to continue to demonstrate long term change to DEAI. I believe it would be beneficial to continue to monitor them in the future, as well as reach back out to those I originally interviewed to see what changes have been made since last speaking. The interviews I conducted give me hope for the future of museums and DEAI, but I must remain critical given the long history of injustice towards communities of color within art and cultural institutions. To conclude, there is no strong conclusion as this thesis is a topical subject that is going to continue to evolve. I am going to leave the original questions here, as I feel we have come full circle in a year without any definite answers. As mentioned in the beginning, critical questions arise as cultural institutions make public statements of solidarity with the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities: Are these statements purely performative? Are they perhaps merely obligatory and perfunctory? Are these institutions actively working to dismantle their own manifestations of systemic racism? How are these institutions going to continue to use their platform to recognize and uplift BIPOC artists and make their institutions welcoming to broader constituencies? How can museums make themselves more relevant in the era of Black Lives Matter? To what extents is the dominant culture's racial injustice occurring within the art institution? Where were art museums' voices prior to the murder of George Floyd?

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